

# Department of Human Services

Prepared by the  
DHS Office of  
Communications  
(517) 373-7394



## Articles in Today's Clips Monday, June 25, 2007

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
*State Employees	2-12
*Foster Care	13-19
Youth at Risk	20-24
Juvenile Justice	25-26
Early Childhood Development	27-29
Health Care	30

\*Important story at this spot

# **Salaries: Databases on public payrolls uphold accountability, equity**

A Lansing State Journal editorial

Pay is a sensitive issue in the workplace. It's hard to consider philosophical arguments when you are talking about your own salary.

Nevertheless, the LSJ's posting of a salary database of Michigan civil service workers - at lsj.com - upholds fundamental principles of our society:

Accountability. Equity. Fairness. And, most of all, the public's right to know.

When launched Thursday, the database set off a storm of reaction among state workers.

The emotion is understandable. The Internet has made it easier to provide details on government operations not usually in the public eye. But these publications are not unique - and they are necessary.

State workers are public employees. They are paid with public funds derived from mandatory taxes or fees. They live in a public realm. At times, this realm may be a tad uncomfortable, but it is nothing new and nothing controversial.

The information at lsj.com is available to all. The state maintains records of how it spends money; those records are open to the public via the state's Freedom of Information Act. And they are available because openness is a critical part of our government. The public can't judge the actions of government without knowing the details of those actions.

And this need is best fulfilled by a database that does include the names of workers.

The state itself has long maintained information on civil service pay grades. That's helpful - to a point.

But to have full accountability - full knowledge - of government, it is necessary to show which individuals make what.

This is not an attack on state workers or an allegation that all state workers are overpaid, or underpaid. With 53,000 people in the civil service database, it's impossible to make such sweeping claims.

In fact, such a database can empower state workers to identify and bring to public attention issues of inequalities in salaries or even problems with wasteful spending. And, frankly, the only way to dispel myths - of, say, overpayment - is to provide the maximum amount of information available.

This is not the first database on state employee pay. But this is just the first of many such databases that are planned for lsj.com.

It is typical fare in your local paper to see the salary for a school superintendent or elected official. The Internet allows for a regular expansion of this principle to a far larger category of public employee.

In the future, it will be typical fare to know the superintendent's salary - and the pay of all those who work below him. More information, not less. More accountability, not less. More interaction, not less.

These are the principles advanced by these databases; principles that benefit all.

# **Unions say they may organize boycott of LSJ**

Publisher: Database of state workers' pay a public service

Chris Andrews  
Lansing State Journal

State-government unions are considering a boycott of the Lansing State Journal after it posted the salaries of state workers on the Internet.

By law, this information is available through the state Freedom of Information Act process.

Nevertheless, many workers were outraged when the State Journal on Thursday posted the names and salaries of more than 53,000 classified civil servants.

Alan Kilar, spokesman for United Auto Workers Local 6000, declined to comment on a boycott. But the local's Web site called the posting "a display of poor journalism and another attack on state workers."

"Because of the possible safety and security issues this action has caused, members are urged to cancel their LSJ subscriptions and let LSJ advertisers know our displeasure with the LSJ," the Web site states.

Mel Grieshaber, executive director of the Michigan Corrections Organization, said leaders of other unions will probably encourage members to boycott the paper.

"I have to believe that most are going to be suggesting to members to discontinue their subscriptions," he said.

The State Journal posted the names and salaries as part of its Data Connection, an initiative to provide readers access to public information that they could not otherwise easily get.

The database also includes a worker's job classification, the department in which he or she works and the county of the work site.

State Journal Publisher Richard Ramhoff said several hundred subscribers have canceled since the database was posted.

"A boycott is certainly not warranted," Ramhoff said.

He added that the data on the Web site have long been public information. The Internet allows newspapers to provide more information than ever before, he said.

"We believe that this level of information is something that taxpayers do have the right to know," Ramhoff said. "It is a service that we provide as part of covering government in all its facets."

Ramhoff also said the information can be useful to state workers. "I think it can empower employees," he said. "They can know what they make and where they stand against other people in their department."

He said the posting did not include the types of information that are typically used for identity theft, such as date of birth, home address or Social Security number.

However, Grieshaber said corrections officers are especially concerned about disclosure of any information because it can be used by inmates to intimidate them.

"Prisoners are very good at harassing when they have tidbits of information on you," Grieshaber said.

"We are very skittish about that, we don't like it."

Contact Chris Andrews at 377-1054 or [candrews@lsj.com](mailto:candrews@lsj.com).



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published June 24, 2007

#### Returns next week

- "Talk to us" - a regular feature on the LSJ Forum page will return July 1.

## Your opinions on the state salary database

### Privacy invaded

What in the vetting process made it OK to expose personal information of 53,000 Michigan taxpayers to the curious and the opportunistic? No one has to hack into your computers to get it. It's right there, just a click away.

Certainly, this is all public information. But the malicious, mean-spirited manner in which it was done is inexcusable.

Many of these 53,000 taxpayers contribute substantially to the economy of mid-Michigan. They serve on boards, hold public office, work with local charities and work to make their communities better places. And yet the LSJ rarely misses an opportunity to malign them.

We must assume that yours was a blatant attempt to quash support for any proposed tax increase by using sensationalized, uncalled for invasions of privacy. Readers deserve better from a capital city daily newspaper. Let's just see what negative impact this will have for your advertisers.

Bill Nelson  
Lansing

---

### Focus on waste

The firestorm over the release of state employee salaries was ignited and fueled by the misuse of power and fanned by hypocrisy.

This is not "public service journalism." Public service enlightens, expands and attempts to unite. Knowing what the neighbor next door, or in the next cubicle, makes does nothing to inform the community. It pits one person against another and implies state employees are the problem.

If the LSJ is inclined to perform a public service relative to the budget crisis, it will have to dig deep to find the waste and boondoggles that squander precious financial resources. Every administration has them and most state employees, if asked, can point you in the right direction. There is a lot the public needs to know, and should know, about how their tax dollars are spent.

But publishing individual salaries was a wasted effort.

Linda Glover  
Grand Ledge

---

### Show all salaries

What is up with this? I think everyone knows the salaries of state employees should be and are public knowledge. Finding this information is probably somewhat difficult. The LSJ is doing a service to make this information more easily available.

Not including the salaries of "nearly all, except politically appointees and some other top officials" is ridiculous, though. Do you not think that these people are the very ones we all would like to see what kind of pay they receive? I believe the public would be more interested in their salaries than those of janitorial/clerical/engineers etc.

If you are going to disclose salaries of state employees now available at LSJ.com/data, have the integrity to disclose all state employees.

Kurt S. Bancroft  
St. Johns

---

### Show comparison

One of the big problems with the Internet is that it is so easy to do something before you've thought it through. The LSJ's posting of state employee salaries, online, is a wonderful example.

No comparative data are provided for any other group or region. This sort of selective data distribution usually focuses on teachers - another group of public employees who, had they elected a more self-serving profession in the private sector, could be making much more.

What salaries are common in retail and industry with similar training and commitment? Just publishing data is not responsible unless it allows readers to make informed conclusions.

Is a 15 percent increase/decrease appropriate? You can't know unless the base and comparative data are provided, too. If it's to be applied to a \$15,000 per year garbage collector, a \$150,000 politician, or a \$15 million CEO, it makes a big difference.

Bruce Pigozi  
Lansing

---

### LSJ loses reader

The quality of the LSJ continues to decline on a daily basis. Even though this newspaper isn't worth the paper it is printed on, I have continued to buy a daily paper for more than 10 years, since it is the only major local newspaper. Silly me - I like to be informed about local news.

However, Thursday you broke the last straw. The LSJ published all state of Michigan employees' salaries online with names. Why did you publish this information? There was no need to print the names with the salaries; that was just plain mean. Please do not publish my address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal information about my family.

I will continue to provide excellent services to the citizens of Michigan without reading your paper. I hope all of the 53,000 state employees do the same.

I will never purchase another LSJ.

Rosemary Franklin  
Grand Ledge

---

### Thanks for nothing

Thank you for publishing my pay rate. Also, if anyone would like to pay my \$35,000 in student loans feel free to do so. Those loans built up over 20 years of attending college part-time, as I raised a daughter on a single parent's wages while I worked at Sbarro, factories, cleaning toilets and whatever else I had to do.

Oh that's right, I forgot, I make almost as much as the oil company executives. Sorry, my mistake.

Oh, another thought, I also canceled my subscription to the paper. I guess I don't need to read the Enquirer - oh, I mean the LSJ - any longer.

D.L. Curry  
Lansing

---

### Legislators gorge

Since the LSJ published state workers' salaries, I wonder how much our elected state officials are paid? And what are their health and retirement benefits? Isn't this public information, too?

In January 2001, our legislators gave themselves a 38 percent pay increase (from \$56,981 to \$79,650), a 20 percent increase for expenses and a 12 percent increase in their leadership supplement. They continue to pocket these exorbitant increases despite our budgetary ills. According to the Aug. 4, 2006, MIRS Capitol Capsule, "Once health insurance and 401(k) benefits are factored in, the maximum compensation package for a sitting legislator in 2006 is \$106,337."

I sure would like to set my own wages and benefits, wouldn't you? My family lost nearly \$12,000 when state worker pay was reduced for two years. We are still struggling to recover. So, I ask, when are our legislators going to make concessions like state workers have?

Amy Lindstrom  
Lansing

---

### Decision shameful

The decision to include employees' names in the state salary database ("State salary database now online", June 21) is reprehensible! Making the names of state employees, who were neither elected nor appointed, available along with their salaries does nothing to promote an analysis or comparison of job activities and salaries between state government and the private sector.

This isn't about scrutinizing state expenses; this is about enabling your readers' prurient, peeping-tom interest about their neighbors' earnings. The LSJ does not publish the street addresses of letter writers, presumably to keep those folks from becoming prey to others because of their opinions. Yet you have chosen to place a bull's-eye on each state employee's back in the guise of providing a public service.

Shame on you.



Edson Schaus  
Lansing

---

#### **Remove names**

I question the motives behind the LSJ creating a database of state employees names, salaries, job title and location of employment. Is it to give the taxpayer information on where their tax dollar goes?

Why does the database not include the salary of public school employees, locally employed civil servants, retirees with a state pension, employees of public universities, etc.?

Apparently this is an LSJ created database and not a link to an external site. Who is going to maintain the accuracy of the information?

If the purpose is to show how much money the taxpayer is spending on public employee service, why not just show a job title, number of employees in that position and the salary range? It doesn't seem that the employee name and location of employment are pertinent to the database.

Protect the privacy of the individual - remove the names and job location from the database.

Karen Palmer  
Lansing

---

---

Copyright 2007 Lansing State Journal Use of this site signifies your agreement to the  
Terms of Service (updated August 2006)

[\[Back\]](#)



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published June 24, 2007

---

## **Todd Walsh: Offering salaries without context isn't reporting**

I am hurt and disappointed. I really am. It is not that the LSJ betrayed me or lied to me, but what it has created is something near the equivalent of a story found in any celebrity gossip magazine.

The LSJ's decision to publish state employee salaries is certainly within the letter of the law, but not within the spirit of decency. More importantly, it is lazy reporting.

What has been produced is something more befitting of the National Enquirer than the Lansing State Journal.

Here is what I mean: I searched for myself. I found out that I work for the Department of History, Arts and Libraries as a general office assistant. I have been employed there full-time since Jan. 26, 2003, and currently make \$37,709.28 a year.

Now, I admit that nearly \$38,000 per year for an office assistant might sound like a lot of money. After all it is a rather budget-busting \$.004 per Michigan citizen per year; a little more, if you include benefits.

What is misleading about that figure is that, as sad as it is, I did not make that much money last year. As a full-time student and full-time employee, I had to make a decision: take fewer classes or work less. I decided to work less. Unfortunately, working less means less income. I am not complaining. That is the decision I made, and I am rather happy about it. I am merely suggesting that proper reporting would have revealed that.

The other thing that a little more elbow grease on this story might have revealed is that I, like so many other state employees, walk into our bland beige cubicles on a daily basis and try to tackle workloads that two or three people may have attended to in richer days. Honestly, I do not mind that so much. It makes the days go by faster.

Lastly, your database neglects to acknowledge that I often work "out of class," as it is called. I do this happily and quite often at my own expense and inconvenience.

I use my personal computer to do a lot of state work because it is faster and more efficient than the outdated computers we have to work with. I use my camera to take photographs of state events, a service that would usually cost hundreds or thousands of dollars, at absolutely no charge to the state. I have used my money to purchase CDs for my office when we were not allowed to use state funds, and I did so without any expectation of reimbursement.

Why would I do this? I do it because I care. I care about what I do. I care about my co-workers and my state.

So, LSJ, maybe now you can understand why I am hurt. Had you asked me about my job, how much money I make, and what I do, I would have happily told you.



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published June 24, 2007

---

## **Jane Briggs-Bunting: Salary database is important part of monitoring our government**

The disclosure of the salaries (along with the names) of state employees is generating howls of complaints from employees upset that their names are linked with their salaries and employment grade.

At the certain risk of having those howls directed toward me, I applaud the LSJ for putting this legally public information on its Web site and performing its watchdog role as a newspaper should. Open government is essential to a democracy and important for Michigan, especially now.

These are tough times in Michigan. The Legislature and the governor are attempting to balance the state's budget, as Michigan's Constitution requires. This is not the federal government where deficit spending can go into the trillions. (As of 10:20 a.m. last Friday, the national debt was \$8,815,717,404,790.28).

It remains vitally important the citizens of this state know down to the penny what we are paying all of our employees. We are still a government of the people, by the people and for the people. It's not the state of Michigan, Inc. Every taxpayer in the state is a shareholder.

Bottom line: State employees, including me (an MSU faculty member), all work for the people of Michigan. Any member of the public should be able to walk in the door of any state, county, city, village, township, university or school district office during regular business hours and ask for this very same information and receive it.

Michigan's Freedom of Information Act requires this information be public, as it should be. Too bad we need a law to ensure the people get to see at least some of the people's business, but we do - or this information would never have been released.

The LSJ had to file a FOIA request with the Michigan Department of Civil Service, and received the information promptly and without charge - both results a rarity these days.

That's a surprise to me, since MSU journalism students had many difficulties this past semester trying to pry public records out of the 83 counties and the intermediate school districts around the state. The vast majority of students waited weeks to get information, and many were told they could not have it. FOIA requires public bodies to respond in five business days, and they are allowed to request an additional 10 days. The reality is it often takes much, much longer to get this information, which is required by the law to be disclosed.

In 1977, when FOIA was passed, the Legislature had the wisdom to clearly acknowledge: "It is the public policy of this state that all persons ... are entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those who represent them as public officials and public employees ... The people shall be informed so that they may fully participate in the democratic process."

I fully expect that Michigan's public universities' salaries will go up on the LSJ data site soon, as they should. To save everyone the effort of looking mine up, I make \$125,993.

*Jane Briggs-Bunting is director of the School of Journalism at Michigan State University. Her specialty is media law.*

---

Copyright 2007 Lansing State Journal Use of this site signifies your agreement to the Terms of Service (updated August 2006)

[\[Back\]](#)

## Program's elimination will put foster children at greater risk

The Port Huron Times Herald, 6/23/07

We all know we have a budget crisis in Lansing. To most of us, the crisis seems to go on forever. Some of us may even know this crisis respects no governmental boundaries and extends even to the quietest branch, the judiciary.

The proliferation of charges and counter-charges, the interplay between all the various actors and interest groups, and the sheer complexity of the mathematics make this whole situation something of a mystery.

So, in simple human terms, here is what the budget crisis means to the Court of Appeals. It means failure - and that failure will have consequences.

Let me explain. We have a dysfunctional system in this state for dealing with child welfare and child protection and no one apparently has a clue as to how to fix it. More than 100 children have died in the foster care system in the past 10 years.

These children live in a world few of us ever see. In this world, as Thomas Hobbes put it in *Leviathan*, life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." And once in foster care, adoptions cannot be finalized until the termination of parental rights (TPR) appeal process is concluded.

Every day a case lingers in the TPR appeal process at the Court of Appeals is a day a foster care child cannot be placed in a safe adoptive home. If the case lingers too long, the child "ages out" of the foster care system at age 18. More than 50% who age out end up committing crimes. So, because a child is waiting, every day counts.

At the Court of Appeals, TPR and custody appeals have steadily increased in the past decade. We have been successful in reducing the time it takes to decide such appeals by more than 30%. This success has been due, in large part, to an innovative program of using contract attorneys to write up these types of appeals, thereby substantially expediting the process. It is a wonderful program, cost effective, efficient, and productive.

But - and of course, there always is a "but" - on June 1, we terminated this program due to the state budget situation. As a result, the delay for deciding appeals of TPR/custody cases will inevitably and inexorably lengthen out. Even though we will continue to expedite these cases, children will remain suspended in the appeals limbo for substantially longer periods of time and there is not one damn thing that I or any other judge of the Court of Appeals can do about it.

The parents of these children have failed them. The child welfare and protection system has failed them. And now, the judicial system will have failed them.

Robert Louis Stevenson once said that at least once in life we all sit down to a banquet of consequences. The consequences of this particular failure will become only gradually apparent, but they will be there and they will be significant.

A child or two or 10 will die. What price will we put on that failure?

***William C. Whitbeck is chief judge of the Michigan Court of Appeals.***

# No quick fix: Concern that casino pay will be spent in Indiana

By JOHN EBY / Dowagiac Daily News  
*Friday, June 22, 2007 10:45 AM EDT*

CASSOPOLIS — Cass County Board of Commissioners Vice Chairman Ron Francis, who attended a recent tri-county economic outlook meeting with St. Joseph and Branch counties, said Thursday, "This problem is going to be with us for at least 15 years."

Francis, R-Cassopolis, said one of the points made at the conference he attended with County Administrator Terry Proctor and Commissioner Gordon Bickel Sr., R-Porter Township, was that American automakers' market share dropped from 55 percent in 2006

to 49 percent in 2007.

"For every one percent drop in the share," Francis related, "the estimated loss of 5,700 jobs in Michigan. That gives you some idea of the magnitude."

Francis said while southwest Michigan seems to be faring better than other sectors of the state, "Cass County is better off than the other two counties from the employment standpoint primarily because our jobs are in Indiana. Fifty-five or 60 percent of our residents live here, but work in Indiana."

Cass County even counts as part of the South Bend-Elkhart metropolitan area, Bickel added.

"One troubling trend is that among 16- to 19-year-olds, they're having a hard time hiring skilled people," Bickel said. "Toyota is doing better than the other auto companies because

their employees haven't reached retirement age yet," saddling it with additional costs.

"One factor stands clear," Francis said. "Educational achievement. We're fortunate we

have Southwestern Michigan College."

Commissioner Carl Higley, the board's liaison to the Cass-Van Buren District Health Board, said it discussed deep cuts, from payroll reduction next year to no conference expenses unless required.

"In four different units," Higley said, "they have no idea what's coming as far as funding," including family planning, school-based spending, crippled children and environmental health.

Commissioner Debbie Johnson, D-Niles, attended the Southwestern Michigan Community

Action Agency meeting Wednesday night.

"They do such a wonderful job keeping their budget in line," she said. "But one of the things they also brought up was that even though it's not in Cass County, it affects all of southwest Michigan," Johnson said, is the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians' Four Winds Casino Resort opening Aug. 2 in Berrien County's New Buffalo Township.

Lakes Entertainment, the casino's Minneapolis-based manager, received 12,000 applications

by June 12, hiring 300 who would be hiring the other 2,200 for the 144,000-square-foot facility with a four-story parking garage and 165-room hotel.

"A lot of Chicago people are buying up the housing out there and pricing out common people," Johnson said, meaning long commutes for casino employees.

"They're trying to (secure a grant to conduct) a study," Johnson reported, "to try and figure out the best way to address the issue. What they're afraid will happen is that the people who get jobs at the casino are going to be moving into Indiana because the housing

is affordable. They're going to work in Michigan, make money, but go home to Indiana and

spend it there. Three Oaks is already struggling in this area, trying to keep students in schools there."

On the other hand, Commissioner Johnie Rodebush said optimistically, "If that \$200 million ethanol plant comes to Niles, it would create about 50 jobs. I've talked to about three of my neighbors and one of them has already been hired at the casino. Another one is putting in her application."

In other June 21 business, commissioners voted 12-1 to adopt a resolution opposing House

Bill 4285, which no member favored during a May 3 discussion. The board is always encouraging citizens to run for various offices and, according to Resolution 80 of 2007, "There is concern that citizens would not run if their financial records might be posted on the Internet. Commissioner Bill Steele, D-Calvin Township, cast the no vote. Copies of the action will be sent to Gov. Jennifer Granholm, Sen. Ron Jelinek and Reps. Neal Nitz and Rick Shaffer.

**The commission also passed Resolution 81 opposing Senate Bill 232, which proposes that**

**all foster children now supervised by the state Department of Human Services (DHS) be**

**shifted to private agencies and the cost borne by counties without providing funding. Copies**

**will go to Granholm, Jelinek, Shaffer, Nitz, the Michigan Association of Counties (MAC)**

**and Family Court Judge Susan Dobrich, who spoke against the measure at a meeting last**



**month.**

**Johnson said MAC opposed S.B. 232 because it would lay off 800 state employees. It is**

**estimated the shift of 3,000 cases from public to private care would cost \$6.5 million the**

**first year.**

**MAC predicated any support on counties being held harmless now and in the future and if**

**it can be demonstrated such a policy change would be in the best interest of the child.**

**"What is going to be the best for children is the biggest issue," she said.**

County Administrator Terry Proctor is trying to balance next year's budget for presentation

July 5.

"Targets were given out to elected officials and department heads," he said. "In many

cases, it was very difficult to meet targets. That's what we're wrestling with, is how much of

our fund balance is utilized next year and how it's used to provide services at their current

level to the citizens of the county. I'm working as well on the presentation of the multi-year

financial plan which this board authorized and approved. We've received the first draft of that report."

Proctor said MAC's annual summer conference Aug. 20-21 is not only two hours away in Grand Rapids in the new convention center, but is expected to be well-attended by people such as Attorney General Mike Cox and House Speaker Andy Dillon, who are expected to

make gubernatorial bids and Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land.

"Usually it's quite a hike away at some northern Michigan resort," Proctor said. "If there's any way you can clear your calendars, I strongly encourage you, this is the year to go."

Sheriff Joe Underwood reminded commissioners that his auction of surplus property is this

Saturday at the fairgrounds' show arena in Cassopolis, with registration at 8 a.m. and bidding beginning at 9. Cash and checks are accepted.

The county granted Kandy Cooper's request to purchase five years of generic service credit

in the MERS retirement program at her cost, \$21,691.

The next regular meeting July 5 will be at 7:30 p.m. The July 19 meeting starts at 4 p.m. in

the commission chamber on the second floor of the 1899 courthouse in Cassopolis.



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published June 24, 2007

#### Related news from the Web

Latest headlines by topic:

- [Parenting](#)
- [Family](#)

Powered by [Topix.net](#)

## Foster parenting training course set

EATON COUNTY — The Eaton County Department of Human Services will be holding a training course for new foster parents this summer.

The course will be offered to Eaton County residents, specifically those that are interested in becoming foster parents. There will be a total of eight classes from July 17 through Aug. 9, Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. The class is required in order to foster children.

The course will take place in Charlotte, at the DHS building located on 1050 Independence Blvd. There is no cost or obligation.

To sign up or to get an information packet, call Jules Mueller-Hayes, foster home recruiter, at (517) 543-5844.

- *Courtney Bowerman*

---

Copyright 2007 Lansing State Journal Use of this site signifies your agreement to the Terms of Service (updated August 2006)

[\[Back\]](#)

# THE DAILY Reporter

[Print this story](#)

## County board approves advocate for children

[Print Page](#)

By Roland Stoy-Staff Writer

COLDWATER — Probate Judge Fred Wood has received the approval of the Branch County board to search for and hire a special advocate coordinator to monitor youth at risk.

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) position will be part time, and Wood told the county personnel committee prior to last week's county board meeting that he also planned to scour the community for individuals willing to be volunteers under the part-time coordinator.

Wood, with senior juvenile court caseworker Ed Dobson, joining him, told commissioners the CASA program can be his "eyes and ears" as to what is going on with juveniles and help resolve issues and problems.

Wood presented information showing that currently in Michigan there are 20,000 children who cannot live at home because it is not safe for them to do so.

He said there are children in Branch County who fall into this category as well.

Wood also told commissioners he sees the program as an opportunity to cut down on the number of cases that begin as neglect and eventually turn into delinquency cases.

"The key will be to find a coordinator who is knowledgeable and interested in the value of the program," Wood said.

He said there will be on-going training for the five to 10 volunteers chosen after extensive background reference checks.

"When I started (in 1988), we had protective services and other workers. That's no longer the case," Wood told commissioners. "Now the services are contracted out, and there is no longer the hands-on help for these problems."

According to literature from Patricia Wagner of Children's Charter of the Courts in Michigan, "When abuse is confirmed our system can victimize these children once again by placing them in a strange bed, often removing them from the only environment they have known."

She said the time it can take to "fix the problem" can take many years before there is a safe and permanent home.

"High caseloads for most foster care workers in Michigan limits the time they are able to give any one case," she said. "For many, they are fortunate to be able to see a child once a month. Beyond that, workers are faced with program policies that limit the efforts they can make for a child."

Wood said other counties have signed on the CASA program, and he has not felt the need until now. He said he would report to commissioners periodically on the status of CASA.

Funding will come from a line-item transfer in his budget.

[Close Window](#)



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published June 25, 2007



(Photo by ROD SANFORD/Lansing State Journal)

On varsity: Waverly High student Montrello Griffin, a Michigan Youth Challenge Academy grad, works out Thursday with the school's football team. The 16-year-old is excited about making the varsity squad.

### About this project

The Lansing State Journal spent much of last year with the Michigan Youth Challenge Academy's 15th class to learn how class members had failed in traditional schools and why they opted for a military academy that tests them academically, physically, mentally and emotionally. Exactly 89 teens graduated in December. Six months later, some are bouncing from home to home. Others are prospering in the real world. Academy officials say most graduates will become productive citizens, with roughly 30 percent going into the military, 30 percent going on to college, and 30 percent joining the work force.

#### Program details

Here's what the program entails:

- Two weeks in a Pre-Challenge program
- Twenty weeks in a residential program where cadets prepare to earn a GED (general equivalency diploma) in classes run by Battle Creek Public Schools
- One-year mentoring program
- Who's eligible: High school dropouts and those on the brink of dropping out

Next academy class starts July 8

Things to know about the Michigan Youth Challenge Academy:

It's a paramilitary program touted as an "alternative to the alternative." Its mix of physical training, book work and vocational education is geared toward high school dropouts and those who are on the verge of dropping out.

- Where: 5500 Armstrong Road, Battle Creek
- Run by: Michigan National Guard
- Function: The paramilitary academy lasts five months. During the two-week Pre-ChalleNGe period of running, hiking and learning military protocol at Fort Custer in Augusta, teens seriously hit the books to attain the equivalent of a high school diploma and to acquire vocational skills.
- Goal: To produce well-rounded men and women willing to become productive members of society. Cadets are trained and evaluated in eight core components: health, leadership, life-coping skills, citizenship, vocational skills, physical fitness, community service and education excellence
- Graduates: More than 1,000
- How many classes so far: 16
- Next class: Starts July 8. Exactly 206 teens have been invited to Pre-ChalleNGe, a two-week period that tests the at-risk youths on all levels at Fort Custer. Those who don't do the military exercises or obey the instructors will be sent home.
- For more information about the academy, contact [www.ngycp.org](http://www.ngycp.org) or (800) 372-0523.

#### Related news from the Web

Latest headlines by topic:

- [Direct Marketing](#)
- [Kids](#)
- [Family](#)

Powered by [Topix.net](#)

## Youth ChalleNGe grads build on new successes

Old habits luring some to failure, but work, football, friends motivate many

Susan Vela  
Lansing State Journal

Montrello Griffin never stopped thinking about football while attending the Michigan Youth ChalleNGe Academy, the Battle Creek paramilitary school for at-risk youth.

He'd toss himself into a pick-up game and wish the drill instructors were gone so he and the other teens could complete some rough-and-tumble tackling.

"Man! I love football so much. Playing varsity my senior year ... I can't ask for nothing more than that," said the 16-year-old, who returned to Waverly High School this past winter.

Despite falling into some old habits, which included ignoring too many homework assignments, Montrello advanced further along the path to success than many other members of the academy's

15th class.

It's six months since the 89 graduated, a contingent only 60 percent of its original size.

Academy officials say that, while 90 percent are employed, at least half quit or lost the jobs they started after reuniting with families.

Some of December's graduates have moved out of their parents' and guardians' homes since saying goodbye to the academy's strict routine. They have failed to test into the military.

Their lives seem no different from when they first applied to the academy because they had dropped out of traditional high schools or were on the verge of doing so, sometimes because of drugs and alcohol.

"There's a reason why we call them at-risk kids," said John Wemlinger, the academy's commandant of cadets.

### **Gaining independence**

Montrello says the academy paid off for him.

He kept his job at McDonald's, gained some independence from his mother, studied hard for his final exams, competed on the track team and gained the privilege of suiting up with Waverly's football players in the fall.

He never forgot the lessons gained on the grounds of the Michigan National Guard academy, which metes out as much tough love as it does military drills and homework assignments.

"It's all about choices ... 100 percent about choices," said Montrello, who pursued an academy education so he could make up credits and graduate from Waverly next spring.

"There's plenty of talented people out there that just choose the wrong things and just never get to see what they can do with their talent."

Waverly Principal David Percival noticed the change in Montrello when he returned.

"He came back and did what was expected of him," Percival said. "He's doing some positive things."

Ryan Gilliland, 17, of Eaton Rapids has another upbeat story.

Before the academy, he sold marijuana. When Ryan kept passing the academy's rigorous tests, a judge dismissed a drug case against him.

Ryan is now a crew leader and trainer at the Eaton Rapids Burger King, mainly responsible for the restaurant's appearance and smooth operation.

Ryan, who has saved enough money to buy a truck and earned the equivalent of a high school diploma, continues to adopt many of the academy's habits. He sits up straight and consistently uses a "yes, sir" or a "no, ma'am."

Ryan's now considering culinary arts studies along with more military training.

"I was really good at it," the teen said. And "the Marines are the closest thing to the academy."

### **Not so good for others**

Post-graduation life didn't fare well for Simon Fogg, a former foster care kid who has bounced from home to home since he retired his academy fatigues. The 17-year-old couldn't be reached for this story.

His guardian Michael Terpening asked him to leave when, after graduation, Simon wouldn't contribute to Terpening's Bellevue household.

"He kind of decided he didn't want to do anything at all," Terpening said.

"He'd eat everything in the house. He'd just lay in the room and watch TV all day.

"We would be happy to get him back. We worry about him all the time. Simon's going to need special help all of his life."

### **More mature**

Lorie Sullivan of Dearborn Heights has become best friends with her daughter, Sara Wilhelm, a graduate of MYCA's Class 15.

"She has really grown from teenage rebellious child to a 17-year-old who is more mature than a lot of people I know," Sullivan said.

Sara has a full-time telemarketing job and plans to start studies at the Michigan Institute of Aviation and Technology this summer.

Without the academy, "at this exact moment, I'd probably be completely drunk somewhere, not knowing who I was or what I was doing," Sara said. "It is so much better now."

Sara, her mom and her grandmother all volunteer at the academy because of the changes it brought about. Sara refers to the Battle Creek school as home.

"I loved living there," she said.

"It's the best thing that happened to me."

Contact Susan Vela at 702-4248 or [svela@lsj.com](mailto:svela@lsj.com).

---

Copyright 2007 Lansing State Journal Use of this site signifies your agreement to the Terms of Service (updated August 2006)

[\[Back\]](#)





## — THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

### Camps' price is right

Program run by probation officers welcomes all

Sunday, June 24, 2007

**BY SETH GORDON**

**News Staff Reporter**

To the casual viewer, the Washtenaw County Summer Sports Camp may look like most other summer sports camps.

The kids run drills and receive instruction from coaches, play games, receive T-shirts and medals and even enjoy visits from local professional athletes.

But the biggest thing that sets the camps that Washtenaw County Juvenile Court probation officers Rich Laster and Bill Malcolm have been running for 15 years is that they are free.

"I don't turn any kids away, and that's one of the strengths of the program," Laster said. "I used to volunteer at coaches' camps, and each kid there had to pay \$300. By me being at the court and seeing the need as a probation officer, a lot of the underprivileged can't afford it. Why should they be denied access just because they don't have the money?"

Ypsilanti resident Vicky Jones brought her two sons, Travis and Sean, not only because of the cost, but because Laster offers camps in several different sports each summer.

This summer's camps, which run Mondays through Thursdays, have covered football and track already, and will tackle basketball, cheerleading, wrestling, tennis and golf. The camps are open to children ages 8-15.

"We do it just about every year, and I usually get about two other parents that send their children with me. It's an excellent program and it's needed."

Malcolm, who works with children on probation in schools across the county, views the camps as a kind of prevention program.

"It's an opportunity to reach out to the kids, whether they're court kids or just kids in general," Malcolm said. "We tell the kids what we do and what we expect from them. We teach them about education, respecting your teachers, respecting your parents and respecting yourself."

When Laster held his first camp, about 50 kids showed up and were instructed by former NFL players. But in order to have a more consistent coaching staff, Laster recruited high school and college coaches from the area to volunteer their time and the camps have been growing ever since. Last year, the basketball camp averaged 475 campers per day.

"The program now runs on its own merits," Laster said. "People start calling the court in the later part of March. The community is aware and they are responding. It has just grown and grown."

Laster and Malcolm fund the camp completely through donations from local businesses, who receive recognition on the back of the camp T-shirts, which are given out at the end of each weekly session. Laster also offers a free lunch on the last day of each session, which he calls "family days."

"I couldn't use county funds, so I went to the community," Laster said. "Whatever they could give, we accept and put their name on the back of the shirt."

Laster still recruits current and former professional athletes to visit the camps and talk to the kids. Two weeks ago, former Detroit Lion Lomas Brown dropped by the football camp, held at Ypsilanti High School's Shadford Field.

Recent Ypsilanti High School graduate Dominique Graham attended Laster's camps as a child and enjoyed the opportunity to give back.

"It's cool seeing how we went from being small like this to going to college and playing college football," Graham said. "They call us coaches and they show a lot of respect. Normally, I'm never around this many kids at once, so it's fun."

Graham will play football for Northwood University this fall with fellow teammate and camp coach Cory Gwinner.

"I didn't do this when I was little. I started late," Gwinner said. "Basically, it will give them an early start and let them know what will happen when they get to high school so they can get ready for it."

With five more sports to go, beginning with golf at the University of Michigan this week, parents can still sign their kids up for remaining sessions.

And if Laster and Malcolm have their way, parents will be bringing their kids to free camps in Washtenaw County long into the future.

"I want to leave something here when I retire," Laster said. "This is something that I want to see continue."

Seth Gordon can be reached at [sgordon@annarbornews.com](mailto:sgordon@annarbornews.com) or

734-482-2829.

©2007 Ann Arbor News

© 2007 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.

This is a printer friendly version of an article from **battlecreekenquirer.com**  
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

---

Article published Jun 24, 2007

Initiatives would require public preschool be available for all

**Ryan Holland**

*The Enquirer*

There are no horns on the yellow tricycles whirring around the sidewalks of the preschool playground, but the drivers kindly will inform you that you are standing in the road.

"Are you speeding?" asked Verda Sherrod, Stars and Stripes Learning Station director of curriculum and professional development, as a line of preschoolers roared past a miniature "One Way" road sign. "You know what happens when you speed."

As 3- and 4-year-olds continue to hurtle toward elementary school — now chock full of tests required by the No Child Left Behind Act — legislators across the country are backing initiatives to make preschool more available, if not universal, in the name of preparation.

Initiatives would require public school districts to provide no-fee pre-kindergarten classes for all 3- and 4-year-olds. So far, Georgia and New York have implemented universal programs for 4-year-olds.

"Kindergarten is no longer kindergarten," said Stars and Stripes President Judi Hetzel. "It's really first grade; kids are expected to be reading when they finish."

But though many agree pumping money into early childhood development is prudent, questions remain about what universal preschool should be and how it should be funded.

## PROPOSALS GAINING STEAM

Building on her four-year-old Great Start initiative, Gov. Jennifer Granholm is promoting a \$200 million plan to phase in full-day preschool for many at-risk youth in Michigan. The proposal would tie funding to curriculum standards and support services, as well as mandatory kindergarten. While Michigan public schools are required to offer kindergarten, attendance is not mandatory.

"If you look at states that are thriving, you see a well-educated citizenry and a highly trained workforce," said Granholm spokeswoman Liz Boyd. "That really starts at a young age, and when you're competing globally, a child needs to be ready to learn."

Boyd acknowledged finances are tight, but maintained the administration would make early childhood education a priority, despite wrangling with the Legislature over next year's budget.

At the federal level, Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton in May introduced a \$10 billion program to provide voluntary pre-kindergarten for all 4-year-olds nationwide.

In recent months, Congress also has passed updates to Head Start legislation, which would raise academic and teaching standards for the program for low-income preschoolers.

"Universal (pre-kindergarten) is definitely on the horizon," said Judy Samelson, chief executive officer of Michigan's Early Childhood Investment Corporation. "Too many kids are hitting that door to kindergarten unprepared here and in other states, and there's a multitude of consequences to that."

## THE BUCK STOPS WHERE?

Many officials are on board, but there are funding complications — especially in Michigan, where programs are varied and preschool and child care often mix.

There's Head Start, which is federally funded. And there's the Michigan School Readiness Program, which is state funded through school districts.

Establishments such as Stars and Stripes are a blend of academics and daycare, for which the federal government pays rent and utilities as long 50 percent of students have parents who work at the Hart-Dole-Inouye Federal Center. And there are nonprofit preschools such as Woodlawn, which rely on tuition to cover expenses.

State funding efforts thus far have targeted at-risk children through school districts. Established in 2005, the ECIC has funneled about \$3.5 million in public and private funds this year to 21 intermediate school districts. Funds are used to hire early childhood education consultants, who design individualized plans for schools.

Granholtz's \$200 million plan, which Samelson said would bring the rate of Michigan 4-year-olds in school to 60 percent, also would target low-income children.

"It makes sense that you start with the greatest return on investment. And in this situation, it's focusing on kids that are at risk," said Samelson.

But Samelson said the early focus on school districts might have unintended consequences.

Dawn Larsen, manager of Kellogg Community College's Early Childhood Education program, said the diverse preschool industry tends to clam up over the issue.

"Groups begin to get real protective when they think the state is going to say it's only going to be this one way," she said. "(They think) it's going to eliminate Head Start or MSRP or private child care or private preschool. They don't want to talk; they are very fearful that they will lose their own area."

Recounting a recent visit to Britain, Larsen said its pre-kindergarten model created more incentives for cooperation.

There, mandates and steady funding from the federal Department for Education and Skills have created "Children's Centers," an economically diverse set of "one-stop-shops" for parents that include child care, 15 hours of weekly schooling and social services.

"When people hear the word 'universal' (in America), I think they begin to panic and see it as a socialist system," said Larsen. "But as England has shown us, universal doesn't mean that we are going to be forced to do something one way; it's a support system for all models."

## COSTS AND BENEFITS

The idea of universal preschool stirs up emotion, especially among parents.

"I think the main thing is that there should be a degree of parental choice," said Ian Slatter, spokesman for the Virginia-based Home School Legal Defense Association. "Parents are in the best position to nurture and teach their children, so people who don't want to send their children to an early learning institution shouldn't have to be burdened through extra taxation."

While Battle Creek resident Shawn Messner agreed child readiness varies, she welcomes making preschool more available.

"It's a big decision, and it depends on the child," said Messner, whose 5-year-old daughter, Laura, just finished

preschool. "But even for my kids, who were at home with me, I wanted them to experience the social aspects and learning that comes with school when they were 3 or 4."

Lori Cochard, who sends her kids, 2 and 3, to Little Friends Day Care, said early education helps children get accustomed to the school environment.

"By the time they reach kindergarten, it's been more of a gradual shift for them, instead of an all-at-once thing," she said. "The downside is that none of this is free. You're going to pay a lot for these programs, so a lot of people can't take advantage of them."

The high cost of preschool and day care — which can reach up to \$150 per week or \$7,800 annually in greater Battle Creek — combined with strict requirements for federally and state-funded programs, often leave middle-class parents in a lurch, Larsen said.

"It's all the more reason to make sure we ... (have) something that is going to address all parents' needs."

## **WORK HARD, PLAY HARD**

Regardless of where the money goes, many believe maintaining high academic standards for preschools is paramount.

Pattie Walter, director of the Head Start program at the Community Action Agency of South Central Michigan, said there was worry a state mandate might create a one-size-fits-all mentality.

"With universal preschool, the idea of all children having access, I think, is wonderful," she said. "But Head Start guidelines for quality and services are important to keep, and we don't want to see those watered down."

At Stars and Stripes, Hetzel and Sherrod seem to have found a way to balance rigid standards and a tailored curriculum.

Accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young People, the school must comply annually with 10 different standards, including teaching qualifications, assessment of child progress and health services.

But the standards have left ample wiggle room for administrators to implement the school's play curriculum, Sherrod said.

"What the curriculum does is cause children to do their own problem solving in their own environment," Sherrod said, standing in the playground. "There is obviously that classroom environment, but out here, whether they're mimicking drawing in a sandbox or dealing with sharing a bike, it's all about participating in that social structure."

As 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds swung, cavorted and peeled rubber, Sherrod kept a close eye on each child, looking for developmental clues.

"You see how he's holding that broom?" she asked, looking at a youngster waddling around a play house and tapping his classmates on the back. "That tells us how he's going to start holding a pencil when he's taking a test."

*Ryan Holland can be reached at 966-0690 or rholland@battlecreekenquirer.com.*

---



## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### The uninsured in Michigan

Sunday, June 24, 2007

n 13.2 percent of all Michigan residents under the age of 65 were uninsured in 2004, up from 12.3 percent in 2003 (the 2004 national average was 17.8 percent).

n 14.7 percent of the uninsured were children under 18.

n More than 30 percent of state residents had no insurance through an employer.

n 6.9 percent of state residents were covered through self-purchased insurance.

By race: Caucasians represented 87 percent of the uninsured; African-Americans 20.8 percent and other minorities 10.5 percent.

By gender: Among adults, males represented 53.5 percent of the uninsured while females made up 46.5 percent.

By income: Families with incomes at or above 200 percent of poverty levels represented 46.6 percent of the uninsured; families below 200 percent of poverty represented 53.4 percent.

By education: Households where the family head has a college or professional degree made up 17.5 percent of the uninsured; those where the head didn't have a degree made up 82.5 percent.

By family type: Families without children represented 60.7 percent of the uninsured; those with children represented 39.3 percent.

By location: Urban residents represented 85.3 percent of the uninsured; rural residents represented 14.7 percent.

SOURCE: 2006 report "Characteristics of the Uninsured and Select Health Insurance Coverage in Michigan," published by the Michigan Department of Community Health. Some numbers were averages of 2002, 2003 and 2004 figures.

©2007 Kalamazoo

© 2007 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.